

For Immediate Release

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RARE ALBUM AND ILLUSTRATED BOOK HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S SALE OF JAPANESE AND KOREAN ART

Japanese and Korean Art

September 22, 2005



Kitagawa Utamaro (1754-1806)

Utamakura, 1788

Estimate: \$100,000-150,000



An inlaid celadon stoneware bowl

Koryo Dynasty (13th century)

Estimate: \$150,000-200,000

New York – Japanese and Korean Art will come on the block on September 22, as the conclusion to Christie's Asia Week. By a wonderful stroke of good fortune, the rarest and most fascinating lots in both categories happen to be 'works on paper': the Japanese section unveils Utamaro's *Utamakura*, an extraordinary and complete set of this artist's most famous erotic illustrations, whereas the Korean section contains a unique album showing *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*. Ceramics, prints, screens, cloisonné, armor and Korean contemporary art complete the offerings for the day.

The appearance on the market of a complete set of Kitagawa Utamaro's *Utamakura* (estimate: \$100,000-150,000) is an unprecedented event that will excite private collectors and museums alike. The *Utamakura* is one of Utamaro's early masterpieces and includes twelve erotic scenes that range from the tender to the terrifying. The artist's renown as an erotica chronicler is widely acknowledged and the *Utamakura* provides vivid and gripping evidence of Utamaro's talent. Both the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London have versions of this illustrated book but both are incomplete. The present copy, a first edition containing the preface, the twelve illustrations, two pages of end text and the original paper covers, is nothing short of exceptional.

Another 'pièce unique' is Toshusai Sharaku's full-length portrait of *Onoe Matsusuke as Ashikaga Takauji* (estimate: \$70,000-90,000). Formerly part of the legendary collection of Henri Vever, this print is apparently the only known impression of the subject.

The sale offers several screens, including *Portuguese Traders*, a two-panel screen from the Tosa School (estimate: \$150,000-200,000) depicting a theme that was highly popular in 17th century Japan: the arrival of the Portuguese traders and their dark-skinned crew. A widespread curiosity about these 'southern barbarians,' their physiognomy and marvelous costumes, triggered a demand for their portrayal that was gladly satisfied by local artists. The present screen was originally part of a six-panel-screen and its attribution to the Tosa School rests upon the delicate brushwork and the elegant pine trees. Consigned by the Metropolitan Museum to benefit the acquisition funds are six paintings mounted as a six-panel screen by Miyagawa Choshun and the Tosa School (estimate: \$30,000-40,000). The front depicts *Beauties and Manzai dancers* whereas the back represents *Thirty-Six immortal Poets and their poems*.

A strong section of cloisonné enamel is led by a large vase from the Meiji period (circa 1890), signed by Kyoto Namikawa (estimate: \$80,000-100,000). This slender, ovoid creation in polychrome enamels and silver wire is decorated with trailing wisteria and butterflies above strands of chrysanthemums, irises, daisies and dandelions.

The Korean section is highlighted by a rare and exquisite folding album of 16 pages by Chong Son (1676-1759) who paired his paintings with a set of poems written by the famous Ming dynasty poet and man of letters Li Meng-yan (1473-1529) (estimate: \$250,000-350,000). The paintings depict eight views of the Xiao and Xiang rivers and are rendered by Chong Son, one of the great artists of the Choson period. He was the preeminent painter of the new 'true-view' landscape, moving away from the Chinese tradition of painting slightly out of focus by creating images that are crisp, neat and sharply defined.

